

# ***PORTRAITS IN/BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE: TRAUMATIC PERFORMATIVITY AND POSTMEMORY IN A JAMAICAN FAMILY ALBUM***

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**Abstract:** In 2014, a collection of photographs and documents pertaining to my paternal forebears, the Campbell family of Jamaica emerged. This archive, which charts the diasporic dislocation and social ascendancy of my Jamaican family over eight generations, had almost been destroyed by my Welsh grandmother and had sat forgotten in the attic of my cousin's house in Florida for over a decade. It traces the cosmopolitan history and transcultural experiences of my ancestors – free men and women of colour – in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century Jamaica. Whilst the documentation clearly reflects the family's emerging financial autonomy and cosmopolitan expertise – fruit of an espousal of Enlightenment aspirations throughout the Americas at the time, which benefitted the region's Black and coloured populations – the increasing whiteness of my ancestors and their adoption of Europeanized fashion, mores and attitudes across generations reflects the

troubling way in which they were also complicit in the radicalized prejudices of Empire, slowly assuming an elitist (post) colonial identity predicated on an erasure of their African Caribbean heritage. During this article, I want to reflect on the traces of negation, negotiation and performativity present in the archival documents, looking at how they challenge binary accounts of Jamaican history that marginalize the experience and agency of the country's coloured population. I also want to draw on Marianne Hirsch's concept of post memory in order to explore the way in which I – a white, British, middleclass academic – have de/reconstructed my own sense of self through an encounter with this hidden family album.

**Keywords:** Jamaican History. Traumatic Performativity. Postmemory.

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Heavy with child

belly  
an arc  
of black moon

I squat over dry plantain leaves

and command the earth  
to receive you

in my name  
in my blood

to receive you  
my curled bean

my tainted

perfect child

my bastard fruit  
my seedling  
my grape  
my strange mulatto  
my little bleeding

Let the snake slipping in deep grass  
be dumb before you

Let the centipede writhe and shrivel  
in its tracks

Let the evil one strangle on his own tongue  
even as he sets his eyes upon you

for with my blood  
I've cleansed you  
and with my tears  
I've pooled the river Niger

now my sweet one it is for you to swim

(Grace Nichols, In My Name).

## Prelude

I am twenty-seven. It is three months since the death of my paternal grandmother and three weeks since my brother's suicide. An immense sense of grief and bereavement hangs over the family home. Unexpectedly, a parcel arrives. It is from my paternal cousin, Ann, and contains a CD-ROM accompanied by a note. The note explains that the CD-ROM contains three photographs; one of my great-grandmother, Mary Ann Taylor, known by the family as 'Gatty'; another of her husband, my great-grandfather George Percival Campbell, and finally, an image of my great-great grandfather, George Percival's father, George Alexander Campbell.

I am taken aback. We do not share photos in such an open way within my paternal family. I am told that my grandmother, Granny Maggie, had attempted to throw these photographs away some years ago, but that my cousin Ann's sister-in-law, Linda, had saved them. They belong to a larger archive of photographs and documents that had been carefully curated by Gatty, and which have sat in the attic of Linda's house in Florida for a decade or so. Now my cousin would like to share them with me. I am reminded of Antoinette-Bertha, the mad creole woman hidden by Rochester in the garret of his English country house in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Rhyss' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I am trepidatious.

I place the CD-ROM in my computer and open the first archive, the photograph of Gatty. I am taken aback by how young she is – I knew Gatty as a very old, very white woman in Jamaica, when I lived there as a child. I am also surprised to see that she looks multiracial in this image, an old *carte de visite*, and the inexpensive photographs that democratized portraiture across the world and throughout the Caribbean.

The next image I open is of my great-grandfather. It is his graduation portrait; he looks young, handsome, and extremely proud. I have only ever seen one photograph of him, hanging from the corner of my Aunt's bedroom, tucked away, unmentioned.

Finally, I open the archive with my great great-grandfather's image. I feel nervous. I imagine that George Alexander must be the slave owner, the





Figure 1 - Mary Ann Taylor (Campbell Family Archive)



Figure 2 - George Percival Campbell (Campbell Family Archive)

planter, the colonial patriarch of the Jamaican Campbell clan. I know that we come from a generationally multiracial family, but I have been brought up to think of my relatives as 'Jamaica-White'; as a family and myself that for all intense and purposes is white, despite some very distant black ancestry. An image emerges slowly on screen of an old, impossibly wise looking black-skinned man with sad eyes and a slight smile playing on his lips. I am shocked.



Figure 3 - George Alexander Campbell (Campbell Family Archive)

What begins to become apparent through these photographs, and later through the wider archive organized and curated by my cousin Ann, is that the Campbell family were essentially people of colour within colonial and postcolonial Jamaica. Increasingly affluent, the family had ascended socially over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through craftsmanship, trade and education. My great-grandfather and grandfather were successful doctors, pinnacles within their community of elite brown skinned Jamaicans. However, this success had been hard won, and was fruit of the struggles of the coloured community as a whole over the course of several generations.

This encounter with the family album and the wider archive of related documents has challenged my sense of self. My grandmother was an inveterate racist, who suffered from a somewhat perverse obsession with and distaste of, race. She had married a brown-skinned man, but had constructed a myth around the family's racial and social superiority within the context of post-emancipation Jamaica. I had been brought up with this narrative, although I was well aware that it was undermined by an array of contradictions, silences and elisions. Gatty, on the other hand, seemed to have maintained a sense of pride in the family, documenting the history of both her own forebears and those of her husband with care and attention.

Based on Gatty's records, my cousin Ann has managed to trace the Campbell family back eight generations to seventeenth-century Jamaica. In order to try and understand this heritage, and to somehow begin to relate to it as a white, middle-class, British academic, I have turned to the familiar field of critical theory and the unfamiliar territory of Jamaican colonial history in order to interrogate and unpack the fragmented data and the precious photographs that comprise my family album.

### **Subalternity, Traumatic Performativity and Post memory**

Critically, I wish to locate my encounter with the family album in the interstices between memory studies and postcolonial studies. I wish to revisit Bhabha's musings in *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Spivak's masterly articulation of subalternity in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), albeit through the lenses of trauma.

Spivak suggests that, in the case of the subaltern "[...] whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject who can know and speak itself" (Spivak, 1988: 27). The subaltern is characterized by pure difference, and is thus totally alienated from – and un-articulable within – the (post) colonial symbolic. Bhabha, who like Spivak draws on Gramsci to conceptualize the subaltern, also makes reference to Derrida's notion of supplementary, and draws on examples of invisibility, ellipsis and the 'evil eye' as postcolonial literary tropes that circumscribe the subaltern

as "[...] lacking autonomy, subjected to the influence or hegemony of another social group, not possessing one's own hegemonic position" (Bhabha, 1994: 59).

My hypothesis is that Spivak and Bhabha's subaltern is less a subject-effect and more a vortex of trauma that erases and effaces subjectivity. Trauma here is characterized, as Luckhurst (2008) suggests, as a wound, as a piercing or breach of a border, a ruptured boundary placing different systems in contact with one another, mixing the outside with the inside, the psychic with the somatic, causing distress or confusion. Importantly, trauma appears to be transmissible from one subject to the next through transference or suggestion. It is an unresolvable paradox, an aporia that disturbs temporal-spatial linearity; trauma can only be understood as such after the fact, and is thus "[...] a crisis of representation, of history and truth and narrative time" (Luckhurst, 2008: 5). It is a locus of chaos, a void where symbolic meaning breaks down and the unprocessed remainder of the real of the traumatic event reiteratively erupts and returns to haunt the subject.

In the case of the Caribbean, subalternity is encompassed to a large degree by the eternal return of the epistemic, disciplinary and enunciative trauma that originally silenced and erased the gendered African slave, who found herself at the nullifying interface between what Žižek describes as the Real in its imaginary dimension (the horrifying abjection of the traumatized body) and the Real in its symbolic dimension (the arch-abstraction of the meaningless letter or theorem) (Žižek, 2013: 480). How else can we attempt to articulate the gendered subaltern but as a doubling over of lack, a being transformed into capital through slavery, and subjected to the most abominable suffering and violence within the (post) colonial scene? Subalternity is thus the traumatic (post) colonial supplement of the impersonal compulsion of the capitalist drive that propelled the European imperialist project and powers globalized capitalism today. Rather than a subject-effect, subalternity marks the annihilating intersection of imperial violence with the looped circulation of global capital.

Thus, I posit that subalternity is, in this sense, the ground-zero of (post) colonial experience; a



discursive black hole, a space of pure difference, a site of trauma, which can erupt reiteratively at any point in the social fabric, swallowing up the subject, engulfing her, erasing her from the social script. For some, this impossible locus is the plane of daily (in) existence; for the rest, it is the eruption of the real around which an attempt is made to articulate a sense of self by hanging onto and appropriating the anterior tropes that constituted (post)-Enlightenment Man, which are nonetheless thrown into disarray and warped by the tremors of colonial trauma. Hence, far from being relegated to the margins of (post) colonial experience, subalternity as traumatic wound is actually the ghostly presence of the arch-violence that continually disrupts and distorts (post)-colonial societies, transforming them into the twisted shadows of the post-Enlightenment West.

The family album under scrutiny here – my family album – is particularly instructive as the Caribbean subaltern is always already erased, yet ever-present as effect. Whilst the documents stretch back eight generations, nobody appears in the family tree who is an African born slave. Rather, we are dealing here with two hundred years of history relating to the experience of the so-called ‘coloured’ population of Jamaica under British imperialism, through emancipation and into independence. What we see, through the photos, census documents, birth and death certificates, is a family of partial African descent progressively ascending in socio-economic terms, superficially espousing the Enlightenment values that spread to the Caribbean in the wake of the American and Haitian revolutions and the Abolitionist movement. However, there is a complex interplay, particularly in these photos, between the adoption of the values of European modernity, the disturbing difference of black skin and features that belies a process of colonial hybridity, and the lingering spectre of disavowed subalternity, the African ancestry that cannot be ‘white-washed’ away. Thus, I am in accordance with Bhabha when he suggests,

It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the white man’s artifice inscribed on the black

man’s body. It is in relation to this impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges. (Bhabha, p. 45, 1994)

On the one hand, there is a trace in the family album of what Knadler (2003) has termed ‘traumatic performativity’; a performative negation of African American identity present in nineteenth century narratives of passing, which are frequently undermined by eruptions of traumatic silence, aporias that destabilize attempts at a coherent discursive articulation of the radicalized self. Whilst my ancestors were not ‘passing’ in the North American sense – race and social class blurred somewhat in colonial Jamaica, and there was more of a colour gradient rather than the binary division between the ‘races’ characteristic of the mainland – nevertheless, these photographs bear witness to,

[...] the way the racial subject is constituted through discourse; often-traumatic gaps call attention to those moments in which the self is unable to pass into, or be constituted according to, any kind of normative or counterhegemonic racial performance. (Knadler, p.65, 2003)

The traumatic gap, in this case, would be the ‘third space’ opened up between Eurocentric garb, black skin and an intergenerational ‘whitening’ of family members through the strategic selection of ever fairer marital partners. A black identity is thus rejected, replaced by cultural alienation, disassociation and denial. Conversely, one can also detect within these portraits a trace of what Bhabha has dubbed ‘sly civility’, which is linked to his key concepts of hybridity and mimicry. According to Bhabha,

My contention, elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that this liminal moment of identification – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking [...] The individuation of the agent occurs in a moment of displacement. It

is a pulsional incident [...] the moment of the subject's individuation emerges as an effect of the intersubjective – as a return of the subject as agent. (Bhabha, p.185, 1994)

Thus there is a subversive undercurrent present within these photographs and archive documents as well, which reflects the incipient agency at the heart of these brown skinned men and women's attempts to ascend socially in colonial Jamaica. Their performativity of 'whiteness', of an acculturated Enlightenment subjectivity, is undercut in the images by their obvious African Caribbean heritage, and reflects the way in which the colonial coloured population of Jamaica challenged the system in its own terms, developing strategies of negotiation that opened up a liminal space for their historical representation and cultural difference as a separate 'racial' group.

My own reception of these documents, and the complex way in which they elicit not only an intellectual but a deeply affective response in me, draws me to the field of cultural memory and, in particular, Marianne Hirsch's notion of post memory. Developed within the field of Holocaust studies, and drawing on cultural memory and trauma studies, post memory describes the relationship of succeeding generations to the transmission of powerful, traumatic experiences that preceded their birth. These traumatic events "[...] still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (Hirsch, 2008: 107). Thus, post memory is the intergenerational embodied persistence of these traumatic aporias, which seem to insist on re-emerging, convoking future generations to attempt to find some kind of closure.

A primary medium of post memory is the photograph. As Hirsch suggests,

Photography's promise to offer an access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, makes it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable. And, of course, the photographic meaning of generation captures something of the sequencing and the loss of sharpness and focus inherent in post memory. (Idem)

Faced with these photographs, I am taken back to the silences of my childhood; the gaps in the family history, the shame around race, the implicit violence in the sudden, brooding uncommunicativeness of my father; the evasiveness of my aunty, my grandmother is many prejudices. If, as Luckhurst (2008) suggests, trauma is a symptom of history whose effects are felt on a deeply embodied level but cannot be fully known consciously, then the unconscious trace of colonial trauma has indelibly shaped my family and been passed on intergenerationally. Thus the sudden appearance of this hidden family album, which came to light in the shadow of fresh family bereavement and loss, seemed at the time somehow comforting, and represented a rupture with the way until that point we had dealt with communicative memory, which had always seemed to be characterized by a dialectic between remembrance and censorship, embodied affect and silence.

I shall now address the family album, contextualizing the photos and documents historiographically, exploring my own subjective encounter with the archive, which I shall attempt to interweave with references to the fields of postcolonial and memory studies, as and when appropriate.

### **The Coloured Population of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica**

According to Mathurin Mair (2006), by 1768 it is estimated that there were three thousand seven hundred free coloureds and one thousand seven hundred mulatto slaves in Jamaica. Unlike the mainland, there were no rigid laws against multiracial unions in Jamaica, for mainly pragmatic reasons; not only did black people make up about 90% of the island's population in the eighteenth century, there was also a constant dearth of Euro-Jamaican females due to the high mortality rate and pervasive absenteeism amongst the island's plantocracy. Thus, it became common practice for white planters to take on black and brown-skinned mistresses, and the coloured population grew exponentially as a result.

These interracial relationships were often founded on violence. As Livesay emphasizes, "[a]





t its most basic and barbaric level, enslavement allowed for intensive sexual predation on bound women.” (Livesay, 2010: 20). Prostitution was rife on the island, as well, and involved free and enslaved black and coloured women in large numbers (Shepherd, 1999). However, many interracial unions were quasi-normative within eighteenth century Jamaican society, and it became commonplace for white bachelors to enter openly into long-term relationships with their “housekeepers”; live-in mistresses who were often accepted (to a degree) by the wider local plantocracy.

In fact, over time, there developed what Livesay has termed a “cultural fetishization of women of colour” (Livesay, 2010: 28). Multigenerational miscegenation produced a plethora of mixed-race women of different phenotypes, and the planters soon began to favor coloured females of a lighter complexion, even at times over their white creole fiancées. Coloured women were quick to realize that there could be benefits to being objects of colonial desire, and used their sexual attractiveness to rich white men as advantage to attain a degree of social and economic ascendancy for themselves and for their children.

M. G. Smith has described these sexual relationships as “asymmetrical concubinage” (Smith in Bryan, 2000: 103). This arrangement was particularly appealing to coloured women as the law of 1733 confirmed that anyone three degrees removed from a black ancestor could be considered white and enjoy the same privileges as an English citizen (Mathurin Mair, 2006: 90). Thus, there was a strong social and economic incentive for multiracial colonial women to continue to engage in extra-marital relationships with white planters in order to further “whiten” their bloodline and ensure the future well being of their descendants.

Moreover, over the course of the eighteenth century, there was an increasing tendency for a privileged minority of white fathers to attempt to arrange the manumission of their illegitimate coloured offspring and favored mistresses. The House of Assembly’s report of 1762 on free coloured Jamaicans gives testimony to the prevalence of this phenomenon and to how a threatened white minority attempted to obfuscate privileged coloured people’s access to their

inheritance. By this period, four plantations, seven cattle pens, thirteen houses and a range of other properties on the island were in the hands of affluent free men and women of colour (Blackburn, 1997: 408).

Given their close relations with influential white men, coloured mistresses were particularly well placed to broker these bequests and to fight for their enfranchisement and that of their children. Whilst manumission merely meant that the master relinquished the slave as his personal property, legal records suggest that, in practice, it also often led to the bestowal of provisions and financial support for the illegitimate family as a whole. As Livesay suggests,

Women of colour who became sexual partners of white men regularly used their relationships as tools for social advancement, especially for the benefit of their children [...] such lobbying often required persistence in the face of a reluctant benefactor [...] Conversely, Jamaicans of colour were so embedded in white commercial and social networks that white colonists often felt the urge to lobby on their behalf when problems arose. The presence of mixed-race Jamaicans within white society, both colonial and metropolitan, permitted more frequent, and more successful, acts of resistance against an extraordinarily powerful system of racial oppression (Livesay, 2010: 52)

In order to put a halt to this trend – which threatened the binary division between white citizens and black slaves that characterized the legislation of colonial Jamaican society – the Assembly passed The Devices Act of 19 December 1761, which capped the amount of property or goods that a coloured person could inherit at £2,000 (Blackburn, 1997:408). The Deficiency Act of 1763 also hindered the economic ascension of the coloured populace. Aimed to bolster the dwindling white population, Jamaican landowners and businessmen were obliged to hire a certain number of whites proportionate to the number of slaves in their possession. Free people of colour were not legally entitled to “save deficiency”, and thus essentially became taxable commodities within the colonial plantation system (Livesay, 2010: 93).

From this point onwards, a number of Acts of Privilege were passed that allowed the children of wealthy and powerful men within colonial Jamaican society to inherit considerably more than this capped amount and to negotiate the Deficiency Laws. Nevertheless, despite the success of a number of these private acts, it is important to reiterate that the majority of illegitimate coloured children were not partial to their father's protection or privileges, and that many remained slaves or, at best, members of the ever increasing, impoverished population of free blacks and coloureds living in urban centres.

In fact, colonial creole society had become increasingly mistrustful of the coloured populace over the course of the 1700s. As Livesay reveals,

Beginning in 1711, the Jamaican Assembly barred the employment of all persons deemed "mulattos" from public offices. Restrictions mounted, so that by 1733 the group had lost the right to vote; a decade later, the Assembly removed their ability to testify against whites in court. (Ibid: 87)

Useful as a social buffer and as a means of abating the binary racial polarity that threatened at any point to tip into full scale black rebellion or revolt, free coloured people were still considered subordinate subjects, never truly on an equal footing with whites either legally or socially. Given this context, Mathurin Mair's evaluation of the social importance of coloured women in colonial Jamaican society is particularly revealing, emphasizing the brown skinned woman's role as subversive agent within an inherently in just plantation society,

Women of interracial unions, heads of their households, frequently engaged in multiple mating, guiding the upward mobility of their families and in the process inculcating socio-racial values applicable to a much wider world than that of the domestic circle. From the perspective of the ruling group in society, such women were persons of influence and authority. Insofar as females who were non-white had any access to power in a power structure that was white and male, they were these women. The

original creole matriarch may well have been not black, but brown. (Mathurin Mair, p. 294, 2006)

Faced with the enormous imparities and inequalities of colonialism, these creole matriarchs, women of colour used their intelligence, guile, beauty and perseverance to carve out a niche for themselves, their children and their siblings in an inherently in just, prejudiced Jamaican society.

### **Mary (17?? – 18??) and Alexander Campbell (17?? – 18??)**

Perhaps Mary Campbell, my great-grandmother three times removed, was one of these coloured 'creole matriarchs'. My cousin Ann discovered Mary through baptismal certificates saved by Gatty and census records available online. George Alexander's grandmother is described as "Mary, a free quadroon, the wife of Alexander Campbell" (Broven, 2014). Mary's lack of a surname perhaps suggests that at one time she had not been free; slaves were often manumitted without the name of their paternal forebears being revealed in legal documents, so as to avoid embarrassment for the father, who would generally be a planter or some other influential member of the local plantocracy. I find myself oddly fascinated by Mary, somehow drawn towards her. My desire is to include a pictorial register of her. I think of the famous print of Agostino Brunias' painting Barbados Mulatto Girl (1764),

Could Mary have looked something like this elegant figure, decked out in clothes that fuse the European and the African, surrounded by subordinate black slaves? A perfect fusion of the stereotypical colonial tropes of coloured woman as sexual temptress and motherly figure (notice her pronounced belly "heavy with child"), the 'great house' positioned in the distance as a suspended threat, the inevitable presence of the plantocracy hanging over the bucolic colonial scene.

Immediately, I am reminded of Hirsch's admonition regarding one of the principal dangers of post memory, which always risks







Figure 4 - Barbados Mulatto Girl, Agostino Brunias (1764)  
(Public Domain)

[...] falling back on familiar, and unexamined, cultural images that facilitate its generation by tapping into what Aby Warburg saw as a broad cultural “storehouse of pre-established expressive forms” in what he called the “iconology of the interval”, the “space between thought and the deepest emotional impulses” (Hirsch, P. 108, 2008).

As Hirsch explains, the index of post memory is the performative index, and “[f]amilial and, indeed, feminine tropes rebuild and embody a connection that is disappearing, and thus gender becomes a powerful idiom of remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting” (Ibid: 124). There is no knowing who Mary Campbell was, what she felt, what she experienced. She is a ghostly figure on the edge of the archive, relegated to the past, lost in all but name. Emblematic, perhaps, only of the psychoanalytical “lost object”, what is she beyond a shadow of my own desire?

The same holds for the spectral presence of her ‘husband’, Alexander Campbell, the remotest Campbell patriarch. Who was this man? Was he the phantasmagoric planter who haunts my imaginary

engagement with the family album? Was he a free man of colour? Nothing remains of Alexander now other than his signature on the baptismal certificate of his son, Alexander George Campbell, my great great-grandfather’s father.

### **Alexander George Campbell (1808-18??) and Frances Appleby Campbell (1820-1883)**

As we sift through the records pertaining to the next generation of the Campbell family – Mary’s son Alexander George and his wife Frances Appleby – traces of the major socio-economic shifts that effected the heritage, status and daily experience of Jamaica’s coloured population towards the beginning of the nineteenth century become apparent.

Over the first half of the nineteenth century, the white creole population of Jamaica dwindled, due to disease, war, the abolition of slavery and the declining value of sugar. The emancipation of slaves in 1834 halted the steady trickle of whites into the island, and the coloured population increased dramatically (Livesay, 2010: 53). Unlike during the eighteenth century, when the tendency was for coloured children to have close filial ties to wealthy white fathers, the coloured population was becoming increasingly endogamous by this point, and thus further removed from creole society and the close affective ties that once bound the two communities together.

In Kingston at least, marriage between people of colour increased exponentially, and illegitimacy levels dropped. The community – which until this point had been disparate, composed as it was of an assortment of freed men and slaves, the privileged children of rich white men and impoverished urban dwellers – began to coalesce and form a stronger sense of identity. As Livesay suggests,

Without white patrons, individuals of colour came to depend upon one another for financial and social well-being, if not for self-identification. This eliminated many of the original divisions prominent in the eighteenth century, and allowed mixed-race West Indians to form a group dependent less upon associations with whites, and more upon self-organization. (Ibid: 58)

Whilst in the eighteenth century, affluent people of colour had sought to improve their lot through privilege bills, during the first half of the nineteenth century the coloured community as a whole began to gather together, communally seeking to redress the social inequalities they faced on a daily basis. Influenced by the American and Haitian revolutions, the relative economic decline of the creole planters and an increasing sense of Eurocentric acculturation, the coloured population began in the 1820s to actively lobby for their interests in Britain and to take to the streets in order to protest for equality (Idem).

As Mathurin Mair explains,

Occupationally, the free coloured were neither landed proprietors, nor chattel workers. They tended to drift into the towns and slid into the no man's land of petty local entrepreneurship, became the artisans, lesser middlemen and women of the economy. (Mathurin Mair, p. 95, 2006)

It is within this economic milieu that we find Alexander George and Frances. Alexander George Campbell was born in 1808 in Kingston, Jamaica. According to the documents collated by my cousin, by the age of thirty-five he was a chaise-maker, by the age of forty-five, a carpenter, by forty-nine a coach-maker and by seventy-five a wheelwright. Alexander George's assorted professions and prolonged working life suggest that he was one of the many lower middleclass free men of colour living and working Kingston at the turn of the nineteenth century. He was a drifting artisan, turning his hand to what he could, making a living to keep his family. Free from the oppression of slavery, he was nevertheless obliged to work in manual labour well into old age.

His wife Frances died in 1883 of heart failure (Broven, 2014). Her date of birth is an estimate, based on her declared age at the time of her death. I have managed to come across a Frances Applebee (the surname is spelled somewhat differently) through online baptismal records, who was born in 1810, a full decade before Frances Campbell's alleged birth. If these two Frances are one and the same (a possibility given the unreliability of

colonial records), then my great great-grandfather's mother was the daughter of an unknown Applebee – possibly a planter; and Ruth – possibly a slave. Born in Hanover, she would have drifted to the capital, like many people of colour at the time, in search of work and a refuge from plantation life.

### George Alexander Campbell (1839-1924)

Alexander George and Frances' oldest son – my great great grandfather George Alexander – was, according to the records, born out of wedlock, in 1839, one year before his parents' marriage in 1840. Compared to his parents, George Alexander had already managed to ascend in socio-economic terms within the coloured community of nineteenth century Kingston. In 1881, on my great-grandfather's birth certificate, his profession is described as 'clerk'. By his death, in 1924, he was a storekeeper, working in Fleetstreet, Kingston, where the family also resided. After Emancipation in 1834 and due to the decline in the sugar industry and the declining opportunities for local artisans, the coloured population began to aspire to jobs in the civil service (Bryan, 2000). Coloured people also increasingly found jobs in commerce and trade in urban centres such as Kingston (ibid: 77). Thus, my great great-grandfather's working life represents the upward mobility of his contemporaries in mid-nineteenth century Jamaica, as the coloured population distanced themselves from the plantations and established themselves as an emerging class in the capital.

I have already described the shock I felt when I first saw George Alexander's portrait. The Barthesian punctum for me, the "[...] accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (Barthes, 1993: 25) was his melancholy gaze and lopsided smile. Campbell means 'crooked mouth', and thus it was George's crooked grin that drew my attention. I was impressed by his elegant suit, his tidy hair, his robust vigour, despite his advanced years. He seemed so present, yet utterly removed; familiar in the etymological sense of 'family', or 'intimate' (I can see my grandfather reflected back through George Alexander's features), but absent, missing. I am reminded of Bhabha when he states that,



To *see* a missing person, or to *look* at Invisibleness, is to emphasize the subject's *transitive* demand for a *direct* object of self-reflection, a point of presence that would maintain its privileged enunciatory position *qua* subject. To see a *missing person* is to transgress that demand; the 'I' in the position of mastery is at *that same time*, the place of its absence, its re-presentation. (Bhabha, p. 47, 1994)

George Alexander *is* invisible; hidden behind the accoutrement of Enlightenment civility, the struggles he must have faced in colonial Jamaica, the constant process of complex negotiation that it took to progress socially and raise a family are all but imperceptible. Perhaps we get a glimpse of a life lived in his eyes, in that gaze that captured me so. George's traumatic performativity, this play of whiteness undercut by his black skin and African features, importantly serves to destabilize my own subjectivity; there is no direct object of self-reflection looking back at me from the photographic image. I am faced with an Other reflecting my post-Enlightenment white European subjectivity back at me through the distorted lense of his own cultural, temporal and racial difference. However importantly, this Other is my ancestor; my blood, my forefather, my non-origin. For there is no originary, essentialist vision of the African Caribbean male here, my gaze is met by a hybrid subject, negotiating his blackness in a racist colonial setting, taking what he needs from European modernity in order to play the system at its own game. Is he an alienated victim? Is he a ginnal, a trickster, an Ananse? I will never know.

### George Percival Campbell (1881-1932)

George Alexander married Rebecca Lee in 1880 and had a number of children, including my great-grandfather, George Percival Campbell. Percy, as he was affectionately known by family and friends, would go on to become District Medical Officer for Lower St Andrew in Jamaica by 1930. The medical profession had historically been occupied by British emigrés or white creoles, and coloured doctors were a minority. My great-grandfather managed to graduate in Medicine by gaining a

scholarship to study at Trinity College Toronto, Canada, where he graduated second in his year, in 1903 (Broven 2014).



Figure 5 - Trinity Medical College, Toronto, 1899 (George Percival is in the Top left-hand corner of the image)  
(Campbell Family Archive)

Historically, education had played an important role in the ascendancy of people of colour in Jamaica. During the eighteenth century, privileges were granted by the Jamaican Assembly on the condition that mulattos were baptized Anglicans and the beneficiaries of a good education – from the motherland, if possible (Austin in Torees and Whitten Jr (eds.), 1998: 451). By the nineteenth century, education continued to be synonymous with middle class aspirations, and was an effective way that coloured people had to differentiate themselves effectively from the impoverished black majority without recourse to the racially derogatory discourse of the creole elite (Idem).

The image of my great grandfather at college in Toronto fascinates me. There is no obvious segregation here, unlike in the United States at the time; black and white students stand next to one another innocuously. George Percival looks painfully young, yet confident, and seems to clasp onto something. Straight away I think it must be his pocket watch, which Granny Maggie gave me when I was seventeen (although, minusthe gold chain, which she had smelted down to make a pair of earrings for herself in the 1950s). But he couldn't have had the pocket watch then; that must have come later, bought with his doctor's income. Like the chainless pocket watch, I long to attach myself to this man, create some kind of link between us other than the diluted blood running



through my veins. But what connection is there? So much distances us from one another. I stare at a stranger who reflects my lack back at me.

### Mary Ann Taylor (1886-1984)

Marriage was another avenue to increasing social prestige. By adhering to Victorian aspirations regarding the family and the role of the respectable woman within the home, coloured Jamaicans could take another step towards fitting into colonial Jamaican life post-Emancipation. George Percival married Mary Ann Taylor in 1912 in St James Parish Church near to Ramble Hill, the small town where her family were from. Gatty's family were coloured Jamaicans, and her mother was of partial Haitian descent. Amongst the documents saved by Gatty in her family archive was her wedding invitation and the write-up of the event in the local newspaper. The description of the celebration is suitably ebullient, emphasizing the bride's "charming attire" and "wreath of box orange blossoms over a beautiful embroidered silk tulle" (Broven 2014). As Bryan suggests,

The wedding day, with its white bridal gown (purity) and its orange blossoms (fertility), wedding ring (captivity or eternal love), secrecy of honeymoon, tossing of the bouquet, the bridal cake with its doves, bells, cupids, roses and horseshoes (all known from Roman imperial times), demonstrated the absorption of ancient European and British folk custom into a ritual of respectability for Euro-centred Jamaica. (Bryan, p.95, 2000)

Thus there was a definitive shift by the twentieth century amongst polite society in Jamaica away from the asymmetrical concubinage and commonlaw relationships of the eighteenth century, as the coloured population, now almost exclusively endogamous, sought to distance itself from its marginalized colonial past, when coloured women had depended almost exclusively on the 'kindness' of affluent white patrons.



Figure 6 - 'Gatty' (Campbell Family Archive)

The manner of Gatty's dress also contrasts with Brunias' idealized, overtly sexual depiction of the colonial mulatta. According to Bryan,

Courtship amongst the elite, in principle and practice, was designed to hinder pre-marital sexual encounters. In her later teens, the female adolescent performed the remnants of what seemed a puberty rite. She 'went into' stays and corsets, then into long dresses. Her hair 'went up' and skirts were let down to the ankles. The eighteenth birthday signified full acceptance into womanhood. Courtship was formal and chaperoned. (Bryan, 2000: 94).

This is evident in the picture above. Gatty is dressed up in the formal attire of nineteenth century respectable femininity. However, there is a newspaper cutting in the archive, taken from a 1984 edition of the Daily Gleaner newspaper that throws a different light on Gatty's initial family circumstances, before she was betrothed to Dr. George Percival. It is an interview that the newspaper carried out with Gatty when she was 97 years old, in Kingston, just before her death. In the interview, Gatty reminisces about the 1907 earthquake in Kingston. Her memories are informative.

According to Mrs. Campbell, "we went through hell". She was at Hart and Sons in Montego Bay,



where she was working as a cashier, when she heard “clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, accompanied by screams of “earthquake”. This was followed by a deathly silence. She rushed out of the building leaving all the cash unprotected. It was some time afterwards that [sic] she realized she was still gripping her pencil tightly in her hand. Only a few buildings had fallen but everyone was badly shaken and terrified. She rushed home to see if her mother-in-law was all right, and was relieved to see that a friend had taken her safely from the second floor of the two storey building into the yard. (Broven, 2014)

This document is particularly insightful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows that Gatty had worked as a young woman, and thus came from uncertain financial circumstances (her father was a carpenter, a humble artisan); secondly, it reveals that she was perhaps courting or maybe even in a relationship with George Percival in 1907, five years before their marriage. And finally, it is painfully moving for me because of the small addendum at the end of the article, after Gatty’s interview comes to a close:

Mrs. Campbell, now living with her daughter Marjorie Campbell, is the grandmother of Miss Susan Campbell who was fatally stabbed on Friday night January 6 1984. (I dem)

#### Epilogue: Susan Margaret Campbell (1949-1984)



Figure 7 - Susan Campbell (Campbell Family Archive)

Thus, we come full circle, and via the earthquake of 1907, return to the tremors of trauma erupting in the social fabric of (post) colonial Jamaica. In

1984, my aunty, Susan Campbell, was murdered. A successful hotel manager, Susan had prohibited the illicit transportation of drugs through the bay in which the hotel she worked at was situated. A week later after taking this stance and defying the local drugs cartel, she was killed, stabbed to death in her home by a petty criminal who had been hired as a hitman.

Thus, notwithstanding the family’s social ascension, and despite their intergenerational quest to distance themselves from the shadow of subalternity haunting their past, once again a Campbell woman was caught in the interface between postcolonial violence and the flow of capital, now manifest as international drug trafficking. Susan had been privileged, the light skinned daughter of a renowned doctor, but at that moment in 1984, she was subsumed by the generalized violence that has assailed Jamaica since its inception. And it is this knowledge that wounds me when I look at her portrait above, and see the soulful eyes and the broad lips reminiscent of George Percival. The punctum for me here is not just poignant or bruising, it is wounding, traumatic.

Hirsch, citing Baer, suggests “[...] photographs in the context of trauma constitute a kind of “spectral evidence,” revealing “the striking gap between what we can see and what we can know”” (Hirsch, 2006: 236). I get no closer to my family through these archives. The photograph’s iconicity simulates a closeness, a presence, which is merely indexical, which points towards a transient past that remains with me., but merely as affective trace. I cannot touch these people, or ever really know them. Our encounter is belated, simulated, performative. My experience of the family album is thus supplementary. These photos and documents at one and the same time affirm and unsettle my sense of self; they puncture through my identification as white and British, and point towards the complex, troubled, hybrid Caribbean past of my ancestry - a spectral ancestry, now, comprised of crumpled paper documents and faded photographs. All that I am left with ultimately are the echoes within the silences, the affective resonances that these portraits and documents awake within me and that persist.

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